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ABSTRACT

Factors that influenced the withdrawal of academically ineligible black students from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill were investigated. It is suggested that students who involuntarily withdraw are rarely consulted as to their reasons for leaving and that academic ineligibility may mask many of the same reasons for withdrawing as are given by voluntary withdrawals. Findings of a study comparing 22 academically ineligible black students with academically eligible non-returning students indicate that the black students considered their poor academic records to be important but did not list their low grades as the most important reason for their withdrawal. The single reason listed by the most respondents was health or personal problems. Some differences between the two groups were apparent although it is noted that judging by the comments added to the returned surveys the two groups are nearly indistinguishable in their reasons for leaving school. It is proposed that reasons for leaving the university are similar for academically ineligible students and academically eligible students. The study also suggests that academic attrition may be reduced by the sensitive response of an institution in areas of nonacademic administration so that faculty need not feel that standards are being lowered in order to retain students. The survey instrument is appended. (Author/SF)

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NON-ACADEMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING THE "WITHDRAWAL" OF ACADEMICALLY INELIGIBLE BLACK STUDENTS

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Non-Academic Factors Influencing The "Withdrawal" Of Academically Ineligible Black Students

The format of the Office for Civil Rights B6 Report, "Reasons for Students Not Returning to Higher Education Programs," does not allow for students who are academically ineligible to return to college to show any other reason for their departure from college. While academic ineligibility does tend to obscure other reasons because of its concreteness, there is good cause to suspect that "flunking out" of college results from pressures and stresses on students of which institutions of higher education might wish to be aware. Given reasonably competent admission procedures, the student who must leave college because of poor grades rarely results from pure stupidity, and even lack of motivation to get good grades is probably coupled with extenuating factors. In fact, students who become statistics of academic failure often have done nothing more to bring about this situation than neglect to follow proper withdrawal procedures from their institution. Yet, the OCR B6 Report does not permit such extenuating circumstances to be reflected in the reasons why academically ineligible students leave college. For this reason, the 1978 B6 Survey at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was expanded to include a small group of students who were academically ineligible to return to this University following their initial enrollment in 1977.

As one of the purposes of the OCR B6 Report is to examine reasons for the withdrawal of black students from traditionally white institutions, only black students who were academically ineligible to return to UNC-CH were included in the survey. Twenty-two students comprised this group and they received the same questionnaire as the larger group of academically eligible students (the questionnaires were color coded to keep the groups separate). In addition to the original mailing, two follow-up mailings were sent which resulted in a total of 12 responses

out of the group of 22. As one student could not be reached at any address on file at The University, the actual response rate was 57.1% (12/21). Additional details concerning the procedures followed are available from the author and a copy of the questionnaire is included at the end.

The table on the next page (Table 1) shows the reasons for withdrawal listed by this group of academically ineligible black students. Several interesting aspects of the table deserve mention here. First, reason #16, "Was failing or not doing as well as I wanted," was mentioned by all respondents as being of some importance in their decision to leave The University. While this is not surprising, given that all of these students were in academic difficulty, it is surprising that not one of the students listed this reason as the single most important reason for leaving Carolina. Two possible explanations for this finding are: either the students used other reasons as excuses for their poor academic performance, or the students' grades actually were affected adversely by other circumstances. Some combination of these two explanations may be the most logical conclusion, but the finding does suggest with some certainty that academic ineligibility was not the primary reason why these students left college, at least not from their perspective.

Second, reason #18, "Needed a break to reconsider my goals and interests," shows the second highest percentage of students indicating that it was important to them in their decision to leave. Yet, as for reason #16, this was not chosen by many students (only 1 in 10) as the single most important reason for their withdrawal from Carolina.

Third, other reasons mentioned by at least half of the respondents are (number of students in parentheses):

#9 - Had health or personal problems (6)

#11 - Did not like UNC-CH in general (5)

#12 - Was disappointed in my major program or school (5)

#13 - Could not get the academic advice I needed (5)

#15 - The University seemed too large and impersonal (7).

TABLE 1 PERCENTAGES OF ACADEMICALLY INELIGIBLE BLACK STUDENTS INDICATING REASONS FOR NOT RETURNING TO UNC-CH IN FALL 1978

	MAJOR REASON		MINOR REASON		MAJOR & MINOR COMBINED			SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT REASON		
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL
1. Did not have sufficient money to stay in college	0	0	66.7	14.3	66.7	14.3	30.0	0	0	0
2. Could not get student financial aid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3. My student aid was insufficient	0	0	33.3	14.3	33.3	14.3	20.0	0	0	0
4. Was offered a job	0	0	33.3	14.3	33.3	14.3	20.0	0	0	0
5. Wanted to get practial experience	33.3	14.3	0	0	33.3	14.3	20.0	0	0	0
6. Could not get on-campus housing	0	0	0	28.6	0	28.6	20.0	0	0	0
7. Got married or planned to get married	0	0	0	14.3	0	14.3	10.0	0	0	0
8. Had a family crisis	0	14.3	0	0	0	14.3	10.0	0	0	0
9. Had health or personal problems	33.3	42.9	33.3	14.3	66.7	57.1	60.0	33.3	28.6	30.0
10. Thought college was not relevant	0	14.3	0	0	0	14.3	10.0	0	14.3	10.0
11. Did not like UNC-CH in general	0	14.3	66.7	28.6	66.7	42.9	50.0	0	0	0
12. Was disappointed in my major program or school	33.3	14.3	33.3	28.6	66.7	42.9	50.0	33.3	0	10.0
13. Could not get the academic advice I needed	33.3	28.6	33.3	14.3	66.7	42.9	50.0	33.3	0	10.0
14. Could not find satisfactory housing off-campus	0	28.6	0	0	0	28.6	20.0	0	0	0
15. The University seemed too large and impersonal	0	42.9	66.7	28.6	66.7	71.4	70.0	0	28.6	20.0
16. Was failing or not doing as well as I wanted	66.7	57.1	33.3	42.9	100.0	100.0	100.0	0	0	0
17. Wanted to travel/study abroad	0	28.6	33.3	0	33.3	28.6	30.0	0	0	0
18. Needed a break to reconsider my goals and interests	66.7	57.1	33.3	14.3	100.0	71.4	80.0	0	14.3	10.0
19. Needed time to decide on a major field of study	66.7	28.6	0	0	66.7	28.6	40.0	0	0	0
20. Finishing incompletes or taking correspondence courses	33.3	14.3	0	0	33.3	14.3	20.0	0	14.3	10.0
21. Other	66.7	0	0	0	66.7	0	20.0	0	0	0

Note: Percentages are based on ten respondents who completed this section of the questionnaire; three were men and seven were women.

Fourth and finally, the columns titled, Single Most Important Reason, show seven reasons mentioned as most important by at least one respondent with only two of these having been mentioned by multiple respondents. Reason #9, "Had health or personal problems," was listed by the highest percentage of respondents (30%) while reason #15, "The University seemed too large and impersonal," was listed by 20% of the respondents to the survey. Rather than accepting these single most important reasons as the sole rationale for the withdrawal of this group of academically ineligible black students, one should review these reasons in conjunction with the major and minor reasons previously discussed. Thus, the picture that one gets from the combination of student responses, or at least from one interpretation, shows a group of students cognizant of their academic dilemma but influenced strongly by non-academic forces such as family problems or poor adjustment to university life. Additional support for this picture is provided by comments students added to their questionnaire; these are presented later.

Additional information gathered through the survey, but which is not presented in table form, suggests the following:

1) In response to question 23 asking if students considered their reasons for leaving Carolina to be personal, university-related, or some of both, five respondents listed some of both (55.6%), three listed personal (33.3%), and one said university-related (11.1%);

2) Despite the academic problems encountered here, three students indicated that they had entered other colleges or universities after leaving Chapel Hill; two students mentioned specific institutions: Methodist College and Shaw University;

3) Future plans of this group of students show that 36.4% plan to return to Carolina to finish their degree while an additional 27.3% may return; only one student out of the group (9.1%) stated that future plans did not include finishing the bachelor's degree.

The question which remains and which was the main reason for surveying this group of academically ineligible students is the extent to which their reasons for leaving Carolina differ from those listed by the group who were academically eligible to continue at this University. Unquestionably there are many differences; yet any interpretation of the data must be cautious because there are numerous similarities as well and one should not overlook either side in making comparisons.

In terms of differences the most striking ones seem to be that a comparatively high percentage of the eligible students chose "other reasons" for leaving while this reason was not mentioned by the ineligible students very frequently, and that few students in the eligible group listed "Was failing or not doing as well as I wanted" as important (24.0%) while 100% of the ineligible group rated this reason as important. Other differences can be noted by reviewing the paper, "Voluntary Withdrawal: Why Don't They Return," (Ironside and Sanford) being presented concurrently at this Conference.

Looking at similarities one must be aware that the small number of students in the academically ineligible group makes comparisons difficult particularly when using single most important reasons. Nevertheless, the findings show that the top two single most important reasons for the ineligible group (and the only ones noted by more than one student), "Had health or personal problems" and "The University seemed too large and impersonal," were ranked fifth and third, respectively, among the academically eligible students. Using the combined totals for major and minor reasons, the comparisons are as shown:

Reasons	Ineligible Rank	Eligible Rank
#16 Was failing or not doing as well as I wanted	1	8
#18 Needed a break to reconsider my goals and interests	2	3
#15 The University seemed too large and impersonal	3	2
# 9 Had health or personal problems	4	7

Without wanting to overstate the similarities, it seems safe, nevertheless, to state that reasons for leaving this University are somewhat the same for academically ineligible students as they are for academically eligible students.

To conclude, several points deserve mention. First, students who had to leave Carolina because of academic difficulties seemed quite aware of their problem; yet, their responses to the survey suggest that non-academic factors were of considerable importance during their enrollment at UNC-CH. Second, their comments (included at the end) voluntarily added to the questionnaire by seven respondents are very similar to some of the comments added by academically eligible students to their questionnaires. In particular, the comments relate to respondents who left Carolina because of personal problems, the impersonality of UNC-CH, and/or academic counseling problems. In reading comments from both groups of students, one senses a feeling of frustration and uncertainty as the student encountered unanticipated and somewhat unpleasant experiences in Chapel Hill. While there is a hesitancy to blame The University entirely, there is also less than complete acceptance of the situation as resulting from personal failure. One might suggest that the comments raise the possibility of a mismatch either between The University and the student in general or between students' needs at this point in their lives and the particular set of experiences offered by Carolina.

Third, and finally, this small study of academically ineligible students demonstrates some support for the rationale for doing the study: students who "flunk-out" of college give many of the same reasons for their leaving college as students who voluntarily withdraw. The same reasons that contribute to students' decisions to leave voluntarily may contribute, also, to academic failure and, subsequently, to nor-voluntary departure. This study will be continued this fall as part of our OCR B6 survey requirements.

Comments From Academically Ineligible Black Students

The seven comments which follow were taken verbatim from the questionnaires returned by students in the academically ineligible group. All comments which were submitted are included here and the entire comment from each student is shown. The opinions stated may not be representative of all students in the group and do not represent views held or endorsed by the author.

*UNC is just to cold and impersonal. I am used to being extensively involved with school activities and UNC is just not the place for the average black student to show his or her leadership abilities. Where I am, I feel more a part of the University-people care and show it. I am very happy where I am and after I graduate in 3 years and get married, I may decide to try for my masters degree at UNC.

*Whenever I think about UNC and the fall semester, I become very depressed. It seems that no one really cares and I was fighting a losing battle by myself. UNC was okay until half way my first when I became sick. Then I started having problems with my teachers and I don't believe they judged me fairly. I saw how impersonal the whole system was and I became totally depressed whenever I thought about UNC. I lost all interest and apathy. I didn't care so I didn't try. Now some of the depression has gone & I've found a new will power to try again and to beat the system no matter what.

*CRAM YOUR ADMINISTRATION.

*Very negative attitudes that developed through a misunderstanding in teaching & counseling faculty. Maybe I needed to much inspiration. When my best was cut-up so was my motivation. School-to-student relationships should be more important.

*I came to UNC with expectations of doing well in many areas, but quickly became disillusioned. I had problems at home, my mother & grandmother both went to the hospital for long periods of time. I could not get along with my roommate. Plus I had poor, or actually no study habits. This was very important with concern to grades. It didn't matter much, because before the mid-semester cram, I had decided not to return after the end of the year (April), so I didn't exert much effort. I do know that I will return to college in four years when I have ended my Naval career. I don't know if I'll return to UNC, but my main goal in life has always been to ba a Phvsical Therapist so I know I will. Right not I am gaining the much-needed discipline that I lacked as a Freshman. It's a great help. I hope that this helps you. It makes me feel better to know that someone is interested.

*I was not doing as well as I felt I could do. I was not satisfied with my major. I need time to find what I want to major in. I have enlisted in the Air Force now. After I complete my enlistment, I may try to return to Carolina.

*There seemed a much better purpose in life for me than a mindful of knowledge which in turn provided me with a comfortable means of living. I image it is important to some degree. However, I found that fountain of living water that my wearied soul searched desperately for - God, and thru him my day-by-day experiences (showing someone who's full of hatred of the world that I love and care for them because God cared for me) is much more important than worldly wisdom & money.

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA
AT
CHAPEL HILL

Office of Institutional Research

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
02 South Building 005 A
Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514

November, 1978

Dear Carolina Student:

You were enrolled at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in Fall, 1977, but you are not enrolled this fall. While our records indicate that you were academically ineligible to continue your enrollment, we believe that there may have been other underlying reasons which brought about this situation. Oftentimes a student will appear to "flunk-out" of college when, in fact, academic ability had nothing to do with it. The student may have gotten fed up with the University, may have encountered personal problems, or may have needed a break; yet, the student's decision to leave college shows up on the record as academic ineligibility.

If you are willing to spend some of your time completing the enclosed survey, I would like to learn of the factors which influenced you to leave Carolina. Perhaps the course work was too demanding for you, that I do not know; but, I would like to know just what led up to your not returning to the University this fall. Please let me hear from you!

A postage-paid envelope is enclosed for your use. Please print your name on the outside of it so that I will know you have responded. Your name will be separated from your responses as soon as the mail is opened so your comments will be completely anonymous. Your participation is voluntary and you may omit any question that you do not wish to answer. All of your responses will be confidential, and no use will be made of the information which would allow you to be identified as an individual.

The information you provide is important and I hope you will take the time to respond; please do so today before it slips your mind. In advance, I thank you for your help and cooperation and wish you well in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Timothy R. Sanford

Timothy R. Sanford
Assistant Director

Encl.

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

I. QUESTIONS ABOUT WHY YOU DID NOT RETURN TO THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL (Please check one response for each question.)

	Major Reason	Minor Reason	Not a Reason	
1.	_____	_____	_____	Did not have sufficient money to stay in college
2.	_____	_____	_____	Could not get student financial aid
3.	_____	_____	_____	My student aid was insufficient
4.	_____	_____	_____	Was offered a job
5.	_____	_____	_____	Wanted to get practial experience
6.	_____	_____	_____	Could not get on-campus housing
7.	_____	_____	_____	Got married or planned to get married
8.	_____	_____	_____	Had a family crisis
9.	_____	_____	_____	Had health or personal problems
10.	_____	_____	_____	Thought college was not relevant
11.	_____	_____	_____	Did not like UNC-CH in general
12.	_____	_____	_____	Was disappointed in my major program or school
13.	_____	_____	_____	Could not get the academic advice I needed
14.	_____	_____	_____	Could not find satisfactory housing off-campus
15.	_____	_____	_____	The University seemed too large and impersonal
16.	_____	_____	_____	Was failing or not doing as well as I wanted
17.	_____	_____	_____	Wanted to travel/study abroad
18.	_____	_____	_____	Needed a break to reconsider my goals and interests
19.	_____	_____	_____	Needed time to decide on a major field of study
20.	_____	_____	_____	Finishing incompletes or taking correspondence courses
21.	_____	_____	_____	Other (please specify) _____

22. From questions 1-21 above, please indicate the number of the one most important reason for your not returning to Carolina this fall: _____

23. Do you feel that your reasons for not returning to UNC-CH were "personal" (such as, illness in family) or "university-related" (such as, the University seemed too big)?

_____ Personal _____ University-related _____ Some of both

II. QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CURRENT ENROLLMENT STATUS

24. Have you enrolled in another college or university since leaving Carolina?

_____ Yes _____ No If yes, please indicate below your reasons for transferring (which my be in addition to any reasons you checked above), and the college you entered: _____

	Major Reason	Minor Reason	Not a Reason	
25.	_____	_____	_____	Needed to attend a less expensive college
26.	_____	_____	_____	Wanted to be closer to spouse or intended spouse
27.	_____	_____	_____	Not accepted in desired major field at UNC-CH
28.	_____	_____	_____	Wanted to be closer to home
29.	_____	_____	_____	Changed career plans
30.	_____	_____	_____	Other (Please specify) _____

(Please continue on the other side.)

III. QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR FUTURE PLANS

	YES	NO	MAYBE	
31.	_____	_____	_____	I plan to return to UNC-CH to finish my degree
32.	_____	_____	_____	I plan to finish my degree elsewhere
33.	_____	_____	_____	I may return to UNC-CH for another degree later
34.	_____	_____	_____	I will earn my degree at UNC-CH by finishing incompletes or by correspondence
35.	_____	_____	_____	I do not expect to finish my degree

IV. QUESTIONS ABOUT YOU

36. Your sex: _____ Male _____ Female
37. Your age: _____
38. Your race: _____ Black _____ White _____ Other
39. During your last enrollment at UNC-CH, were you classified as a resident of North Carolina for tuition purposes? ____ Yes
40. What class were you in when last enrolled at UNC-CH?

____ Freshman ____ Sophomore ____ Junior ____ Senior
____ Fifth year ____ Unclassified
____ Professional (law, medical, dental)

41. If you had chosen one, what was your major? _____
42. If you ever received student aid from UNC-CH, how much did you receive from these sources? (Please list the total amount for all years for each type.)

Basic Grants (BEOG) $ _____ Supplemental Grants (SEOG) $ _____
Direct Student Loan (NDSL) $ _____ Other loan $ _____
College Work-Study (CWSP) $ _____ Other part-time job $ _____
University Scholarship $ _____ Other scholarship $ _____

The short-answer questions on this survey are easy to tabulate by computer, but we realize that they may limit your responses. Therefore, we urge you to use the space below, adding other pages if necessary, to explain more fully why you decided not to return to Carolina this fall.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please return your survey and comments as soon as possible in the enclosed envelope. So that we can know who has responded, please print your name on the outside of the envelope in the space provided. Thank you for taking your time to help us!